



COASTAL CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

# ***INTERVIEWING***

Coastal Carolina University  
Career Services Center

## **PURPOSE OF AN INTERVIEW**

A common misconception about interviewing is that it is a one-sided process....that the primary purpose of an interview is for an employer to evaluate a candidate to determine whether or not they want to hire that candidate. On the contrary, an interview should be a two-way process. **For both parties involved in an interview, the primary concern for each should be to determine if they are willing to invest in the other based on the return they can expect on their investment.**

**For an employer** the investment is generally made in the way of salary, benefits, training, and other resources. The return they expect is that their employees will contribute in some manner toward the overall achievement of their organizational goals and mission. This could range from increasing revenue for the organization to developing new products, services or systems or contributing to staff morale. The return an employer expects on their investment is unique to each company and depends on the organization's specific priorities.

**For an employee** the investment is in *how* and *where* they choose to spend a major portion of their time each day.... in other words, the type of work they do and the atmosphere of the organization they do it in. *Where* they choose to work is particularly important since the decision impacts personal life factors such as how much money they can make...how much vacation time they get...the benefits they receive, etc. The *type of work* they do is important since it can dictate such work attributes as independence, variety on the job, the ability to be creative, etc. The return an employee expects on their investment is unique to each individual and depends on their individual life goals and work preferences.

## **TYPES OF INTERVIEWS**

Interviews differ depending on their purpose and where they are held. Understanding different types of interviews and what to expect from each type, can help you prepare accordingly.

**The On-Campus Interview** - On campus interviews take place in college Career Centers or other college facilities, and allow students and employers alike to participate in multiple interviews in one day. In general, on-campus interviews are usually screening interviews and one-on-one interviews.

**The Screening Interview** - The screening interview is typically conducted by a recruiter or individual well trained in interviewing and is designed to weed out candidates and cut down on the work of the actual hiring authority. It may be conducted over the phone, on campus, at a career fair, in a personnel office, or on-site at the place of employment. It is usually brief...lasting from 15-30 minutes and is a popular method for many school systems and large corporations. If the interviewer is impressed with your performance, you may be invited to a second interview, often held with a different interviewer.

**The One-On-One Interview** - In a one-on-one interview you meet only with one individual at a time. In some cases, you may meet with only one person, or you may have numerous one-on-one interviews in a row with different constituents of the organization, each having input into the hiring decision. For example, it is not uncommon in the course of an interview to meet individually with, first, the hiring manager, then the CEO of the company, and finally, a representative from Human Resources.

**The Panel Interview** - A panel interview involves more than one interviewer at a time asking you questions. It is necessary to establish rapport with each interviewer, since each participant will likely have the opportunity to evaluate you. Making direct eye contact with each individual is essential.

**The Group Interview** - In a group interview several candidates are interviewed at once. This type of interview is intended to determine how candidates interact as team members, or may be used to save time if the organization hires in large numbers. It is also a popular style for graduate school interviews.

**The On-Site Interview** - An on-site interview occurs at the employer's facility and can last anywhere from an hour to a whole day. It may include a meal with key individuals, testing, and/or a tour. It often includes a series of one-on-one interviews with different individuals and/or a panel interview.

**The Phone Interview** - Phone interviews are increasingly used as initial screening interviews and generally last 30 minutes or less. A phone interview is typically pre-scheduled, but may be impromptu, so it is a good idea to keep your resume, job search materials, notes about the organization and pen and paper near the phone while job searching so you don't have to put the interviewer on hold to go look for them. Since the interviewer can't read your body language during a phone interview, they will be concentrating on your voice; therefore, watch your language and inflection closely. It is also a good idea to be dressed and groomed professionally for a pre-scheduled phone interview since you are likely to feel and act more professional if you look professional. Finally, be sure your telephone is answered in a professional manner at all times during your job search; by yourself, as well as by others in your household and/or your answering machine.

## **TYPICAL STAGES OF AN INTERVIEW**

All interviews fit a general pattern. While each will differ somewhat, most will share three common characteristics: the warm-up, the information exchange, and the wrap-up. The typical interview will last approximately 30 minutes to an hour although some may be longer.

### **The Warm up**

**1) First impressions** - The interviewer starts to evaluate you before you even open your mouth. It is a good idea to arrive early to show your respect for the interviewer's time and your attention to punctuality. You will also be expected to shake hands upon introduction. Don't be afraid to extend your hand first as this shows assertiveness. Also, don't under estimate the power of physical appearance and non-verbal behavior. Dress professionally, sit and walk with good posture and don't fidget. Finally, be sure to smile and relax!

**2) Building rapport** - Many interviewers begin the interview with small talk on such topics as the weather, sports, common acquaintances or how your travel was to the interview. This component rarely has anything to do with your job-specific skills, but is designed to help the interviewer evaluate how well you communicate on an informal basis. You must do more than smile or nod to score points in this area. Participate actively in such discussion. You may even wish to brush up on current events by reading the newspaper or watching the news in the days preceding your interview.

## The Information Exchange

3) *The overview* - The interview "officially" begins when the interviewer either offers an overview of the company and/or position, or asks you to provide an overview of yourself and your background. If he or she opens with an overview of the position and/or company, it may be vague. Do not hesitate to ask for details at some point during the interview if you need more information. If the interviewer opens by saying, "Tell us/me a little about yourself," be prepared to provide an opening statement of no more than a minute or two in length. You should briefly describe who you are and highlight your professional or academic background. You may also offer personal information about yourself and indicate where your current career interests lie.

4) *The interviewer has the floor* - At this stage in the interview the focus turns toward the interviewer asking specific questions about your background, experiences, skills, goals, etc. It will be important for you to demonstrate how your experience and abilities match the position and the challenges it poses. It is critical that you state accomplishments from your past which support your candidacy.

5) *Your turn to ask questions* - When the interviewer asks if you have any questions, this is your cue that the interview is coming to a close. By asking intelligent, well-thought-out questions, you show the employer that you have researched the company and are serious about the organization. The questions you ask should be designed to bring out your interest in and knowledge of the organization. This is also an appropriate place for you to ask the interviewer what the expected time frame is for filling the position and when you might expect to receive feedback on your interview.

## The Wrap-up

6) *Summarize* - Often the employer will ask, "Is there anything else you would like us/me to know?" This is your chance to offer a brief bulleted summary of your skills, reiterate your interest in the position and highlight anything you were not able to elaborate on during the information exchange portion of the interview. As with the overview, keep your comments to a minute or two in length.

7) *Final Impressions* - The interview is not over until you walk out the door. Try to remain friendly, enthusiastic, and courteous. Shake hands firmly with the interviewer and thank him or her for considering you. Let the interviewer know that you look forward to hearing from him or her soon.

## TYPES OF QUESTIONING STYLES

**Directed** - This interview style will have a definite structure. The interviewer will generally have an itemized agenda of how you will spend the time allotted for the interview (you may even receive a copy of it), as well as a list of specific questions he or she wants to ask you.

**Non-Directed** - This interview style will be less structured. The interviewer may ask very broad, general questions and not take charge.

**Traditional Interview Questions** - General "What do you think about...?", "Do you....?" or "Have you ever...?" questions.

**Behavioral Interview Questions** - Quickly becoming one of the most popular methods of asking questions, behavioral interviewing focuses on *specific* examples of past behavior as a means of predicting future behavior. Questions such as "Tell me about a time when....", "Can you give me an example of...?", or "Tell me about a situation in which you...." are typically asked in a behavioral interview.

**Scenario/Case Questions** - This interview style is designed to evaluate your probable performance or technical knowledge by asking hypothetical "what would you do if....?" questions. A specific problem or situation will be given and you will be asked for solutions or recommendations. Your problem solving abilities and thought process may be equally or more important than your response to the question.

**Ethical Dilemma Questions** - An elaboration of the scenario or case question, this interviewing style is designed to determine how you would respond to a situation of an ethical nature. Your responses to ethical dilemma questions may be used to assess your work ethic and/or if you hold the same philosophies or values as the organization.

**Stress Questions** - This interviewing style is not as common as others and tends to be reserved for positions where it is important to determine how candidates react to and hold up under pressure (such as law enforcement). Stress interviews often include particularly tough scenario or ethical dilemma interviewing styles, particularly no-win questions. Stress interviews also frequently include timed or problem-solving tasks. In extreme cases, stress interviews may involve uncomfortable physical surroundings such as an unusually hot room or sitting in a position where sunlight from a window shines directly into the interviewee's eyes.

### • **The Star Method**

Behavioral interviewing questions don't have to be difficult to answer. A terrific way to respond to behavioral questions is to use the STAR method. Make sure you address *each* part of "STAR" to answer the question fully.

**Situation:** Discuss a situation or problem that you encountered  
**Task:** Share the task, which the situation required you to complete, or the ideas you generated for resolving the problem  
**Action:** Tell specific actions which you took, steps you followed, obstacles you had to overcome, etc.  
**Results:** Highlight outcomes, goals achieved, accomplishments, etc.

### **Here's an example:**

**"Tell me about a time when you feel you provided exceptional customer service."**

**Situation** - "When I was working for the university's catering office, I was responsible for booking reception rooms for special events. A woman called two weeks before her daughter's wedding to cancel her reservation for the reception room. A death had occurred in the family and the wedding was postponed until further notice."

**Task** - "The customer was obviously very upset about the unfortunate circumstances and I knew it was my job to carry out the logistical procedures for canceling a room, as well as to put her mind at ease about the reception arrangements."

**Action** - "Although deposits are generally non-refundable due to loss of revenue, I felt certain it was not too late to book another event, so I checked with my manager regarding the possibility of refunding her deposit. We were able to rebook the room with another event, return her full deposit, and I assured her we could reschedule the reception whenever the family was ready."

**Results** - "The customer wasn't expecting to get any money back and was pleasantly surprised, as well as relieved, that canceling the reception plans wasn't a hassle. She wrote a very nice thank-you letter to my manager commending the way in which I handled the situation, and my manager complimented me for taking initiative with this customer."

## **TYPES OF INTERVIEWERS**

Interviewers will obviously have varied (and not always clear-cut) styles for interviewing, as well as individual preferences in what they seek in candidates. However, if you can identify the interviewer's style upfront, you can deliver the type of responses most likely to win them over.

**The Pro** - Skips the small talk and gets right to business. Asks short, to-the-point questions and shows little to no reaction to your replies. Don't be intimidated by the unresponsive style. Make your answers equally short and direct. Look the interviewer squarely in the eye and communicate your confidence in handling the job.

**The Intellectual** - Asks thoughtful, revealing questions and is more interested in *how* you do your job than *what* you do. Is typically interested in your philosophy or ethical approach to your work. Demonstrate that you are an "idea" person by describing specific techniques you have employed, the judgments that govern your activities and the reasons you would do well in the position.

**The Amateur** - Keeps you waiting, leads you into messy office, and spends most of the interview talking about company issues and telling irrelevant stories. Be an enthusiastic audience but slip in a few anecdotes that show your own work experience in a positive light. Essentially, this interviewer will hire you if he or she likes you, so be an attentive listener.

**The Pal** - Looks you confidingly in the eye and says "I just love your resume - now tell me about yourself." Be careful. These are the sneakiest interviewers of them all. They try to make you trust them by acting like your best friend and will hold what you say against you. Be cautious of their charm and don't be overly disclosing and lose out on the job. Take your cue from their friendly style and describe yourself as a team player. Use examples that say, "we did this" rather than "I did this" and tell them you're attracted to the company's people-oriented atmosphere.

**The Power Player** - Uses pressure tactics designed to test you, your patience level and your threshold for stress. May leave you waiting in the reception area long past the appointed time, interview you simultaneously with several people in an intimidating set-up and subject you to a series of rapid-fire questions. May even ask for information you can't possibly supply. Show that you can handle pressure by demonstrating spirit and a sense of humor.

### **How do employers *really* decide whom to hire?**

◆ It is important to understand that employers do not always offer the job to the "best" candidate based on knowledge, ability and skill alone. Certainly, one must meet the basic qualifications of a position; however, assuming that one does, an interview is often a fairly subjective process. When all is said and done, the interviewer may interview several more-or-less "equally" qualified candidates and ultimately offer the job to the person he or she likes best or feels would be the best "fit" for the organization. Personality, confidence, enthusiasm, a positive outlook and excellent interpersonal and communication skills go a long way in the interview process.

◆ It will be important for you to communicate (and demonstrate by offering examples of previous experiences) that you are flexible, can work with others and have the desire to do the work. Your previous performance (both work and academic) is the greatest predictor of future success.

◆ Employers also like people who are similar to them so it may benefit you to learn how to mimic (without being obvious or mocking) another's verbal and nonverbal communication style.

## GENERAL TIPS ON INTERVIEWING

*(These tips are key to your success!)*

### **BEFORE THE INTERVIEW**

• **Identify the "return" you expect on your "investment"** - In other words, "What is it that *you* want to get out of your position?" It is essential for you to know what your *goals, preferences* and *values* are when it comes to work. For example, how would you rank the importance of these factors: salary and benefits, receiving recognition for your work, the freedom to be creative in your work, variety in the job, the ability to contribute positively to society, having privacy, receiving ongoing training / education, or the opportunity for advancement? These are just a few examples of the many critical factors that can impact an employee's personal satisfaction level with his/her employment.

• **Employer research** - Just as a company uses your resume as an initial screening tool and a way to prepare for interviewing you by identifying your skills and experiences, so, too, may you use an organization's printed literature to prepare yourself for the interview. The Career Center contains a directories section and an employer information section to assist students with employer research. In addition, the internet is an invaluable tool for learning about a company's products, services, benefits, philosophy, training, facilities, operating budget, profit margin, "claims to fame" and more! It is also important to research the company culture and the history of the position you are interviewing by talking to networking contacts already inside the organization. The Career Center offers a *Networking* handout to assist students in this important step.

• **Prepare for questions in advance** - Identify *experiences, skills* and *characteristics* unique to you. Formulate answers to commonly asked interview questions. Know how to identify and respond to the hidden agenda of trick questions. Compile a list of questions you will ask. The Career Center offers several handouts and excellent books in the Career Library to assist students in this area.

• **Compile relevant information to take with you** - Some organizations might ask you to fill out an application in addition to providing your resume, which may require information such as past addresses, phone numbers, salary history, supervisors, etc. You should also take extra copies of your resume, your transcript, and notepad or leather folder for taking notes along with a nice pen, and if appropriate, samples of your work (your portfolio).

• **Practice, practice, practice!** - Just as a performer must rehearse many times prior to a successful performance, it is essential to rehearse prior to a successful interview. The Career Center simulates interview scenarios through *Mock Interviews* and provides constructive feedback to assist you in developing stronger interviewing skills. Your mock interview can even be videotaped for you to keep if you wish. To schedule a mock interview, simply inquire at the Career Center's front reception desk. It is also a good idea to rehearse with friends who know you well or in front of a mirror.

### **AT THE INTERVIEW**

#### **How to dress / Physical Appearance**

- Groom yourself appropriately (freshly showered, clean hair, clean finger nails, etc.).
- Make sure your shoes are polished and attire is well pressed with no stains, wrinkles, loose hemlines, etc.
- Do not chew gum, suck on candy, smoke, etc.
- If you play with rings, necklaces or other jewelry, do not wear them. Otherwise, wear minimal jewelry.

### **Making the first impression**

- Go *alone* to the interview. Show confidence.
- Arrive at least ten minutes early. Be sure to account for possible rush hour traffic.
- Introduce yourself confidently to the receptionist and indicate whom you are there to see.
- Be cognizant of your behavior in the waiting area. The receptionist may be observing you as you wait.
- Know how to pronounce the interviewer's name correctly. Repeat his/her name when you greet

### **Nonverbal communication**

- Shake hands firmly with the interviewer and anyone else to whom you're introduced. If you are not accustomed to shaking hands, practice until you are comfortable.
- Make eye contact when speaking to someone.
- Always wait until you've been offered a seat, or until the interviewer sits.
- Be aware of your posture at all times - stand tall, sit up straight, and lean slightly forward in your chair during the interview. Cross your legs at your ankles when sitting.
- Beware of talking with your hands too much - the best bet is to fold your hands in your lap.

### **Verbal communication**

- Use good diction and proper grammar. Eliminate "um", "like" and "you know" from your vocabulary.
- It is fine to pause for a moment before answering a question in order to formulate an organized response.
- Answer questions thoroughly by using examples and stating results.
- Express yourself succinctly and clearly. Don't monopolize the conversation and don't ramble.
- Make sure you answer the question asked. If a question is multifaceted, be sure to address each part.

### **Be attentive**

- When introduced to others, concentrate on remembering their names. The easiest way to do this is to repeat the name following the introduction: "Donald Seltzer? Nice to meet you Mr. Seltzer."
- Pay attention. Don't ask questions about information that was already addressed earlier in the interview.
- Ask for a business card at the close of the interview (to ensure you have proper contact information).

### **Your past**

- Answer all questions without being evasive. While past failures and shortcomings need not be volunteered, don't try to cover them up or sidestep them. If you do have a "blemish" in your past, simply explain the circumstances around it without giving excuses or blaming others.
- Never bad mouth former supervisors, colleagues or employers. If you were unhappy somewhere, cautiously explain that it was not a good fit.

### **Your attitude**

- Emphasize that you are flexible, willing and team oriented.
- Turn your weaknesses into strengths that need development.
- Show confidence, interest, assertiveness and enthusiasm, not arrogance, aggressiveness or immaturity.
- Be yourself. Smile, relax, be friendly, not stiff and staunch, and think positive thoughts!
- Be honest in all your answers. You'll show credibility and integrity.
- Be courteous, polite and respectful at all times.

### **Illegal questions**

- If a question sounds iffy to you, simply say "I'm sorry, I'm not certain I understand the relevance of that question to my ability to fulfill the duties of this position. Could you possibly rephrase the question?"

**Negotiating salary**

- Do not overemphasize money. Save heavy discussions about salary for the second interview.

**AFTER THE INTERVIEW**

- Thank interviewers for their time and shake hands firmly with a smile.
- Indicate that you look forward to hearing from them soon and welcome them to contact you should they need any additional information.
- Promptly send a thank-you note (within 24 hours) and reiterate your interest in the position. This may be either handwritten or typed; often the handwritten note conveys a more personal, sincere touch.
- Follow up appropriately by providing any credentials, references, transcripts or samples of work that might have been requested by the interviewer as quickly as possible. (Be sure you get the full name,

## INTERVIEW PREPARATION CHECKLIST

- ◆ Research organizations at the Career Center Library, or on the internet.
- ◆ Research the latest trends (including salary ranges) in your intended profession and target industry at the Career Center or on the Internet.
- ◆ Attend an *Interviewing Workshop* or talk with a Career Counselor about interviewing techniques.
- ◆
- ◆ Sign up to participate in the Career Center's *Mock Interview* program.
- ◆
- ◆ Pick up additional handouts listed on the front of this packet in the Career Center.
- ◆
- ◆ Develop and *rehearse* a two minute opening overview which briefly describes who you are and highlights your professional or academic background. You may also offer personal information about yourself and indicate where your current career interests lie.
- ◆ Develop and rehearse your closing summary.
- ◆ Identify *why* you want the job. Practice your response to this statement until you can state it clearly.
- ◆ Identify what you have to offer/help the company. Practice this statement until you can state it clearly.
- ◆ Analyze your strengths (assets) and weaknesses (limitations or challenges). Be able to state them clearly.
- ◆ Develop a list of behavioral questions you think the interviewer might ask and write down possible examples you could provide using the STAR method. Rehearse your responses.
- ◆ List specific skills you used/developed in various experiences and incorporate those into your answers
- ◆
- ◆ Develop a list of intelligent, meaningful questions to ask the interviewer.
- ◆ Select appropriate interview attire. Make certain clothing is pressed, shoes shined, etc. the night before.
- ◆ Confirm the time, day and location of any scheduled interviews, as well as whom you will meet.
- ◆ Make sure you have adequate directions. If needed, drive to the location in advance to determine how long the trip takes and make certain you know where you are going.

# Fifty Standard Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What do you want to do with your life?
3. Do you have any actual work experience?
4. How would you describe your ideal job?
5. Why did you choose this career?
6. When did you decide on this career?
7. What goals do you have in your career?
8. How do you plan to achieve these goals?
9. How do you evaluate success?
10. Describe a situation in which you were successful.
11. What do you think it takes to be successful in this career?
12. What accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction in your life?
13. If you had to live your life over again, what would you change?
14. Would you rather work with information or with people?
15. Are you a team player?
16. What motivates you?
17. Why should I hire you?
18. Are you a goal-oriented person?
19. Tell me about some of your recent goals and what you did to achieve them.
20. What are your short-term goals?
21. What is your long-range objective?
22. What do you see yourself doing five years from now?
23. Where do you want to be ten years from now?
24. Do you handle conflict well?
25. Have you ever had a conflict with a boss or professor? How did you resolve it?
26. What major problem have you had to deal with recently?
27. Do you handle pressure well?

28. What is your greatest strength?
29. What is your greatest weakness?
30. If I were to ask one of your professors to describe you, what would he or she say?
31. Why did you choose to attend your college?
32. What changes would you make at your college?
33. How has your education prepared you for your career?
34. What were your favorite classes? Why?
35. Do you enjoy doing independent research?
36. Who were your favorite professors? Why?
37. Why is your GPA not higher?
38. Do you have any plans for further education?
39. How much training do you think you'll need to become a productive employee?
40. What qualities do you feel a successful manager should have?
41. Why do you want to work in the \_\_\_\_\_ industry?
42. What do you know about our company?
43. Why are you interested in our company?
44. Do you have any location preferences?
45. How familiar are you with the community that we're located in?
46. Will you relocate? In the future?
47. Are you willing to travel? How much?
48. Is money important to you?
49. How much money do you need to make to be happy?
50. What kind of salary are you looking for?

Don't just read these questions--*practice and rehearse the answers*. Don't let the company interview be the first time you have actually formulated an answer in spoken words. It is not enough to think about them in your head--practice! Sit down with a friend, a significant other, or your roommate (an especially effective critic, given the amount of preparation to date) and go through all of the questions. Make the most of every single interview opportunity by being fully prepared!